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SUBJECT: MIXED MESSAGES ON PLO UNSC STATEHOOD INITIATIVE

Classified By: Consul General Daniel Rubinstein
for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Summary: Senior Palestinian officials have been sending mixed messages about the seriousness and speed of the PLO's call for a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution declaring a Palestinian state on the basis of the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital. PLO Chief Negotiator Saeb Erekat spoke out publicly in favor of the initiative on November 14, but later privately told U.S. officials that he expected it "would never reach the Security Council." A senior Abu Mazen advisor noted in the press that "there is no point in rushing" the proposal, and that the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) intended to proceed deliberately. Palestinian Authority (PA) Prime Minister Salam Fayyad avoided endorsing the proposal directly in a November 15 press conference, and drew a distinction between it and his own state-building plan. Hamas criticized the initiative as a distraction from resistance and intra-Palestinian reconciliation. End Summary.

EREKAT PRAISES PROPOSAL PUBLICLY, DISMISSES IT PRIVATELY

¶2. (U) In a November 14 interview with Palestinian daily al-Ayyam, Erekat said that the Palestinian leadership is preoccupied with gathering support to pursue UNSC recognition of a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders. He went on to describe a November 12 statement by the Arab League Follow-Up/Arab-Peace Initiative Committee endorsing the initiative as a "major achievement." Erekat also stated that PLO Chairman and PA President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) had raised this possibility with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Russian officials, and claimed that "all of the Palestinians' interlocutors had responded positively to the idea." Erekat added that the "purpose" of the proposal was to "render settlements and any unilateral steps by Israel irrelevant."

¶3. (C) Erekat told U.S. officials on November 15, in contrast, that the proposal "will never reach the Security Council." According to Erekat, the proposal -- and the outreach campaign that accompanied it -- was in fact intended primarily to bolster Abu Mazen's regional standing and relationships with key Arab allies in the wake of Abu Mazen's November 5 announcement that he did not intend to run again for the PA Presidency (reftel). Erekat added, "no one on this side is really thinking about unilateral steps. What we are saying to Abu Mazen is, 'Why do you want to leave? You're not alone. Don't do it (resign); the Arabs are with you.'"

ABU MAZEN TO SEEK SUPPORT IN EGYPT, BRAZIL

¶4. (SBU) Presidential political advisor Nimr Hamad, announcing that Abu Mazen would discuss the idea with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo on November 18, told local media that "we have no intention of rushing in our request to the UN Security Council. We are going to have to prepare for this well, and to hold political and diplomatic talks. We want the Security Council to discuss this only after we've been given assurances. There is no point in rushing just so that we collide with an American veto." Note: PA sources also tell Post that Abu Mazen will raise the proposal on his upcoming trip to Latin America, which includes a visit to Brazil. End Note.

FAYYAD FAILS TO ENDORSE

¶5. (U) At a November 15 Ramallah press conference, Prime Minister Fayyad side-stepped endorsement of the PLO proposal, saying that declaration of a Palestinian state was a "formality" once the institutions of a Palestinian state were created, as proposed in his own two-year statehood plan (released in August 2009). Fayyad noted that it was the responsibility of the PA to "lay the groundwork" for statehood -- and the responsibility of the PLO to declare statehood "when the conditions are right." He distinguished his own two-year plan from the PLO initiative, saying, with regard to the former, "they're talking about unilateralism, to which we reply -- yes, building state institutions is our responsibility. And we embrace it."

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HAMAS CONDEMNS

¶6. (U) Gaza-based Hamas legislator Salah Bardaweel criticized the proposal. Arabic-language press quoted Bardaweel as saying, "this move is not a meaningful declaration. It simply aims at escaping the benefits of resistance against the occupation. Instead of threatening to declare a Palestinian state unilaterally, to be established in the air, we should work on liberating the occupied territories." Bardaweel continued, "instead of declaring a state on twenty percent of the land, why not declare a state from the river to the sea, liberate the land, and end the state of (Fatah-Hamas) division?"

RUBINSTEIN